

THE PASSING OF THE CASTE SYSTEM

THE eighth and last lecture of the course, on November 16th, was densely crowded, the ordinary restrictions on admission being waived, so that every inch of space was packed. Dewān Bahādur L. A. Govindaraghava Iyer presided, and was very warmly welcomed.

The Chairman observed that he had been told that some harsh things were going to be said by Mrs. Besant against the Brahmins, or at any rate, that they were to be treated to ideas which might appear to be not pleasant to the Brahmins. He also heard that she had a purpose in fixing upon a Brahmin as Chairman that night. But if Mrs. Besant considered that the placing of a Brahmin in the Chair was necessary, she was mistaken in fixing upon him as that Chairman. He was one of those who thought that any caste or section of caste had first to look to the welfare of the community of which it was a portion in the first instance; and with the reason ceasing for any particular portion having dominance the dominance was bound to go. The question of caste

was one which was intimately associated with the Hindū social organisation and there were numbers of people who attributed much of the good influences in Hindū society to the system of caste. There were again numbers equally large, if not larger, who thought that many of the evil features which now darkened Hindū society could be ultimately traced to this pernicious system of caste. For ages past, caste was a recognised institution and it was bound up with Hindū genius. Pains should be taken not to subvert it but to modify it, and change its influence, so as to make it more suitable to present-day conditions. Whether they willed it or not, there were laws at work which affected the making and progress of society. Those laws were bound to affect Hindū society as much as any other, and they would be rendering great service if they recognised what the purpose was for which those laws were intended, so that they, by willing recognition of what was expected from them, might also throw in their lot intelligently in the way of putting those laws into operation in a way which would cause the least friction. They should in that way invite all discussion, and welcome it. It was idle to pretend that the caste system could be abolished altogether. When they thought that their progress could not be effective or desirable unless they carried the masses with them, and unless they implanted in the masses some of those cravings, the realisation of which would make them progressive,

then they had to recognise that it was impossible to do away with castes. The subject was the Passing of the Caste System. It might well be that it had to be recognised that the 'conditions in which they were living had become so changed from what they were when caste was first thought of, that there was a necessity for a rearrangement of the basis on which Hindū Society was to proceed, and every one ought to recognise that there was considerable force in that desire for rearrangement. They found that although the hereditary organisations still continued, the specialisation of functions was no longer to be found now. With respect to several social observances there were lapses. With the intimacy of communications of the different nations of the world, and the interchange of thoughts between the peoples of the world, their ideas were undergoing transformation, which must have an effect on the system of caste as well. The time had come when they should take account as to how they stood, how best their goal might be reached, what modifications were necessary, and how best to bring about those modifications. To do that they wanted persons who had experience not only of this country but of other countries. If they could only secure one who, with a scientific and analytical turn of mind, was able to bestow a dispassionate consideration on the question and viewed it with sympathy and understanding so as to enable Hindū Society to take its proper place, to such a

person their thanks would be due. Mrs. Besant spent her whole life-time in a scientific study of things. She knew enough of their Society, and she had such insight into Hindū sentiment and the conditions of Hindū life, that she would interpret them to the meeting correctly, with the detachment of view that was essential to a consideration of the subject.

He called on Mrs. Besant to deliver her lecture.

Mrs. Besant said :

MR. CHAIRMAN AND FRIENDS :

. My wish to have a Brāhmaṇa in the Chair was not because I wanted to say hard things of that great caste, but because I wanted to separate my lecture at the outset from the idea that it was an attack upon Brāhmaṇas. Most, though not all, of my dearest friends in India belong to that caste, and I should not dream of attacking it. May I, before I begin, say one word of especial thanks to our Chairman, because he travelled all through last night in order to keep his engagement to-day, and I feel grateful to him that he has come at very great inconvenience to himself in order to fulfil his promise to occupy the chair this evening.

. I am not unmindful of the very serious gravity of the question on which I am to address you this evening. It is quite true that the institution of caste lies at the very foundation of the Hindū system of polity, and no one who did not take a pleasure in destruction, no one who was not reckless of the

results of what he did, would dream of striking at the foundation of the house without exercising great care as to how his blows were made. For it is quite possible, when you are dealing with foundations, to bring the whole building down about your ears; certainly a result that no lover of India could hope for, certainly not an outcome of any very careful consideration of the subject. Let me say at the very outset that I do not regard the fourfold caste as necessarily destructive of what is called brotherhood. I know that is very often said, but I do not share the opinion, and I will tell you why; I have found in my personal experience with my Indian friends that it very often was more conducive to brotherhood than injurious. I have found that the recognised line of the great castes very often made it possible to have a social friendship which in the West it would be difficult to carry out. For instance, in Benares one day I happened to want a shawl and went into a wealthy friend's house; he sent round word to a shop to bring some shawls down. The merchant who was going to sell them came in, sat down on the drawing-room floor beside us, playing with the children of the house and conversing about public matters, while waiting for the arrival of the goods. And I confess that in the West I should have been very much surprised if I wanted a shawl, and Messrs. Robinson came in there, and made themselves entirely at home in my drawing-room.

Similarly, I have noticed that when a dramatic representation was being given, the whole place outside the immediate one marked for the guests was thrown open to the streets, and people came up from the street and enjoyed the theatrical performance without let or hindrance of any kind ; the mutual courtesy that grows out of a recognition of the order made that a possible thing to do, whereas no one having a party in London would dream of letting any one come up out of the street. It would not be possible. A recognition of a social order very often may conduce to greater freedom of social intercourse. It is not then along that line that I am going at all.

I am going to submit that with the progress of evolution in human society you must have in a living society flexibility and the power of adaptation. I am going to submit that the caste system, as it exists, is rigid, lacking in flexibility, and unadapted to the present conditions of the day. I am going to submit that very sweeping changes are necessary, but side by side with the changes there should be the recognition of certain facts in nature and certain facts in history. I am going, in fact, to try to show you that great alterations must be made, and that the caste system, as it exists to-day, has to pass away. The realities underlying it can never pass away, for there are certain great facts in nature which are not peculiar to India but are found everywhere, which are the real foundation, or were the foundation, of the

system in the past; it is because the caste system of to-day fails to meet those facts of nature, it is because the dharma of the caste and the name of the caste are now entirely unrelated, that the caste which was natural has now become artificial, and that which was a defence to Hindūism has now become a danger and a menace to progress. Changing conditions are all around us, and every nation is adapting itself to those changes brought about by the inevitable progress of evolution, which, let me remind you, is the expression of the will of God.

Now we notice that in Indian history great reformers have tried practically to abolish the caste system. You find Guru Nānak, for instance, and the latest of the ten great Gurus of the Sikhs, Guru Govind—you find they tried to make an equal brotherhood without recognition of caste. You cannot read the institution of the definite organisation of Sikhism by the tenth Guru, without seeing that he was sweeping away entirely all differences that could be called differences of caste. Nevertheless, in modern Sikhism those differences have grown up again. Hindū reformers of more orthodox type, they also for a time, like Chaitanya, have tried to do away with caste; none the less it has ever returned. Even in the Christian Church you may have noticed that there is caste among Indian Christians as well as among the Hindūs; and quite lately in the Court some of the Christians claimed their right to go into the chancel

of the church, while others said : " You may stand down in the nave, you may remain in the aisles, but we cannot allow people of your sort to come to the sacred chancel near the altar." When you see caste reappearing everywhere, it gives pause for thought. As our Chairman has said, that system has lasted for thousands of years. You have to see why it has lasted. It has lasted because there is a truth at the base of it. It has lasted because that truth needed expression at the time when the system was formed. The vitality of a system is in the truth concerning it, and not in the errors. That is true as regards everything that lasts for ages. The venerable has ever in it some kernel of truth, and I am not in any way going to ignore that in the points that I want to put to you. In fact I rather feel as though I should offend all of you ; on one side by showing the uses which caste has subserved in the past, on the other in saying that the time has come for radical changes which are needed by the progress of the people. And I do not know whether I shall be in the proverbial position of a person who falls between two stools, because I am going to try to show you the two sides of the question, and that is the best way of getting abused by both sides of any method that I know.

First of all then, friends, as regards caste, I want to remind you of two passages, very familiar to you, which we find in that great scripture, the *Bhagavad-Gītā*,

and I will ask you to remember, when I mention that sacred name, that it is a book which, perhaps above any other book in India, sways the thought of the great masses of the people, both educated and uneducated. It is useless to ignore, it would be criminal to deny, the enormous weight that this great scripture has in Hīndū thought, and we must and we ought gladly to recognise the weight that we may here find attached to the system of caste; although I shall submit that it is only to the true system to which these shlokas apply, and not to the changed and degraded system that we find in India now. Shrī Kṛṣṇa says in the fourth adhyāya: "The four castes were emanated by me by the different distribution of qualities and actions. Know me to be the author of them, though the actionless and inexhaustible." Then later on in the 18th adhyāya the same idea is repeated: "Of Brāhmaṇas, Kṣhātrīyas, Vaishyas and Shūdras, O Parantapa, the duties have been distributed, according to the qualities born of their own nature." There you have caste, as defined, as seen, by Shrī Kṛṣṇa Himself, emanated according to certain qualities, distinguished by certain natural characteristics; and that view of caste, I may remind you, laid down by Shrī Kṛṣṇa, is one which is also emphasised by the Manu. It is one which you find asserted in several of the Purāṇas; it is one which you find proclaimed in the *Mahābhārata*, so that this union of name and quality lies at the very

foundation of caste as rightly understood and as serviceable in the progress of a nation.

Look outside India for a moment. Is there any country in the world where the fundamental natural facts on which caste is based by Shri Kṛṣṇa are not to be found? You find a productive class, the manual workers, that we call in Europe the proletariat, the great masses of the population, the producers of wealth. I put them then as the productive class. Then you have above them the class that takes those products, that distributes them over the nation and over the world; I will call that the distributive class. Then you have a third class, those who protect and guard the whole nation, the protective class, represented by the nobles with the King at their head, by the judges, by the barristers, as we should say over there, by all who are engaged in the profession of law, by the army, the navy, right down to the ordinary soldier and sailor and the civil police force in the nation. Their duty is to protect, and under their protection the whole nation works at peace. Because they are there to guard, the producers of wealth can work in safety; because they are there to guard, the distributors of wealth can send their goods to every corner of the nation, and load ships with them to distribute them over the world; and so you find those three: first productive, next distributive, and third protective. Then you have one other class—those who instruct. Now, if you look at this in

the West, now far does the hereditary principle come in? because that is the next point that we shall have to consider with regard to caste here. It is quite clear that the productive class are those who here would be called Shūdras; that the distributive class would be called Vaishyas; that the protective class would be called Kṣhattriyas; and the teaching class, religious and secular teachers, those here would be called Brāhmaṇas. But notice that in all these, qualities and classes go together. Those who belong to the productive class produce; those who belong to the distributive class distribute; those who belong to the protective class protect; and those who belong to the teaching class instruct. But you do not always find that those who belong to the Shūdra caste here produce. On the contrary, among Rājās there are some Shūdras. You do not find that every Vaishya distributes, though, on the whole, the Vaishya has kept to his dharma more than any one of the other castes. You certainly do not find that the Kṣhattriya carries on the whole government of the country, or the legal business, or the administrative work. You do not get many Kṣhattriyas among your Vakil population here in Madras. When you come to the teaching class, I am afraid that the Brāhmaṇas are rather conspicuous by their absence from that. So you see the difficulty we are getting into by dividing the qualities and the castes. See how you have the confusion of caste which Arjuna

feared and prophesied. You are in the midst of it to-day; for remember that the highest—the teaching caste—is the one on which the strictest rules were imposed, the greatest restrictions laid. They could not have the liberty of the Shūdra to go about wherever they liked and to travel as they pleased. They could not have the wealth of the Vaishyas; that was taken up by the Vaishya. They could not have all the pomp and the strength of the Kṣhattriyas; that was taken by the Kṣhattriya. In the old days learning was their glory and poverty was the crown which they wore; but you now find surely that most of the lawyer profession are Brāhmaṇas, Mr. Chairmaṇ. It is no wonder, because of the brilliancy of their intelligence, and they are the most highly educated caste, and have been so for thousands of years. Remember that they are the caste against which all the arrows are shot by those who do not approve of the longing for liberty among the Indians. Sir Valentine Chirol, for instance, always talks about the Brāhmaṇa caste as dangerous, that which should be trampled down and destroyed. Why? Because they stand for educated India, if you take them as a whole caste. I do not mean that in the other castes you do not get splendid men; but I mean that the highest intelligence certainly belongs, on the average, to this caste above all others, the caste which has been highly educated, which has been learned for thousands of years.

Now with regard to that, I said I would ask where in Europe—England I will take as an example—the hereditary principle comes in? Clearly, it does with all the four but one. If you look back to the Middle Ages and see how it worked down to our own day, you will find the proletariat, the productive class, fastened to the soil. Generation after generation the son of a serf was a serf. But there is still a trace of that left in modern England, for in modern England if a tramp or vagabond is taken up, what do they do with him? The first thing they do is to ask him what is the parish to which he belongs; where does he belong by birth; and then they send him back to his place of birth because, as a child of the soil, he must be supported on the portion of the soil where his birth took place. It is one of the many traces of the old system, that sending back a man to his own parish to make him chargeable upon the people to whom by birth he belongs. If you take the middle class, you find that right through the Middle Ages, as they grew up, the freedom of the occupation of the people of that class passed from father to son. Now, although I am three parts Irish, I have one-fourth part English, from my father. He happened to belong to the Fishmongers' Company in London. They are not now fishmongers—for those Companies are a queer survival of old privileges; but because of the hereditary principle, I could take up my freedom in the Company, although for my part I had

nothing to do with it save by right of birth. Then again, if you take the King and the nobles, clearly there the right is hereditary, and the outcry against the House of Lords is that it is based on the hereditary principle. The only class in Europe which was not based upon that was the Church. The Church was thoroughly democratic and took in people from everywhere. Why? Because the priesthood was celibate, and because with celibacy, with an unmarried priesthood, the hereditary principle obviously cannot be maintained. That is the reason why the hereditary principle is not visible with regard to the Church.

Look then for a moment at that fairly, and recognise that everywhere this fourfold division must inevitably exist. You must have division of labour. It is the very groundwork of civilisation. The arrangement wherein the cultivator of the soil had a knife stuck into his belt, so that he might save his life from the marauding thief, is not a convenient arrangement for a civilised country. It is perhaps better to have a policeman round the corner, than for one to keep one eye in one direction and another in another, to see whether anybody was coming to cut your head off. You must have this division. It is the very condition of progress.

Why then am I speaking of the passing of the caste system? Because the qualities and the divisions of the castes do not now go together; because the qualities are no longer found marking out the

castes one by one ; and because the hereditary principle no longer represents the facts as it did in the time when quality and name went hand in hand. Exactly the same reason that in England gives rise to the cry : " Abolish the House of Lords," gives rise here to the cry : " Abolish the caste system." The leaders have forgotten their duties, and in forgetting their duties they ought rightly to forfeit their privileges. In the old days in England when a man was a Duke, what did it mean ? *Dux*, a leader ; and when a trader took off his hat to the Duke he took it off to a man who bore on his shoulders the burden of the trader's defence. A Duke had to go and fight in the battlefield for the trader ; he had to lead his own retainers into the field for the tradesmen. The Duke and his peers had to support the whole burden of the army of the country, and not one penny of taxation fell on the wealthy trader while those men were a reality in England. But can you wonder if now a tradesman turns round and says : " My Lord Duke, I pay taxes for the standing army ; you no longer defend me for nothing, as you used to do in the old days. I cannot give you both things : I cannot give you the honour due to the man who fights for my protection, and also pay the heavy tax for the army and navy, for the defence which was your duty, and which you have neglected to do."

The same reason comes in here. When the Brāhmaṇa was learned, when he was poor, when he was

the teacher of the people, and when he was verily the mouth of God for those amongst whom he lived, there was no complaint as to the honour paid to the Brāhmaṇa caste; it came out of a grateful heart, and it grew out of a real reverence for spiritual superiority; but when a man goes into a law-court and finds the Brāhmaṇas contending one with another on two sides of some legal question, you can hardly wonder if he turns round and says: "My Brāhmaṇa friend, you used to teach me for nothing; you used to educate my children: now you ask me to pay fees to you as a Vakil. You must not expect the honour due to a Brāhmaṇa at the same time that you take fees for the fighting of my case."

Now where you find these things taking place in different countries, it means that a change is going on. That is why I make the comparison. You have here to deal with a great world-movement, which is altering the conditions of modern society, and the duty of the thoughtful and the wise is to try to understand the forces that are at work, to compare them in country after country, and realise the unity of forces under the differences of names. Then I think you will see that, all the world over, this great movement changing society is going on in every community. It demands flexibility, it demands the absence of rigid caste here, of rigid class in the West. It demands that a man's qualities shall have free play in society, and that he may do whatever his inborn faculties enable him to do.

If I look back into the past, into the facts of the caste system, I find in that past that there was a very great flexibility. I want now for a moment to glance at the historical side, because originally, remember, there was no caste among the Āryan people. It was not an original institution of the Lord Vaivasvata Manu, the Manu of the Āryan Race. At first there was absolute equality, for all were children of the Manu. 'Sons of Manu' was their title of honour, and between sons there may have been elders and youngers, but there was no division of caste. Caste was only established when the Āryan minority, coming down into India, was in danger of being swamped by constant intermarriages between that Āryan minority and the vast majority of the mixed population round them. I recall the name of caste in Samskr̥t. What is it? Varṇa, colour—a very significant name. If you happen to remember a picture by Ravi Varma, a picture of Viṣṇu in the form of the Fish-Avātāra, you may recall that He is coming up from the sea of matter with four little children in His arms; and one child is white, one is red, one is yellow, and the fourth is black. What does the legend mean?

You have four Varṇas, or colours. If you go back you will find that the pure-blooded Āryan was white; that intermarriages had brought about a red type—intermarriages with the great warrior race of the Toltecs, whom the Āryans first fought and then fraternised with, so that you had great groups in Northern

India of red-brown people. Then there had been intermarriages also with a type of Mongol, with whom all trade was carried on, and the intermixture of the Āryan and the Mōngol gave rise to a yellow type. Then there were the children of the better class of aborigines, not the lowest types but a comparatively civilised type, though blacker, and these passed into the ranks of the Shūdras.

New pause on that for one moment, because it is important historically. Your white Āryans, white as when they came down, and of pure descent, they were the Brāhmaṇas; and as they came down to the South they became, in the South, the hereditary priestly class, changing in colour naturally with the change of climate—for as I was pointing out to you on Friday, differences in colour of skin are differences of climate and not of race. Then you had a great fighting caste of pre-Āryan India, a mighty, stalwart people, intermarrying with the conquering Āryans, who became the Kṣhattriyas, the mixture of the Āryan with the red Toltec giving rise to the red-brown type that is still preserved, let me remind you, among the Kṣhattriyas of Rājputāna. Then you have the third, the trading people, the Vaishyas, who had the yellow tint by intermarriages with the Mongols; and then the great mass of the population, the dark, the Shūdras. All those who had the Āryan blood were twice-born, and the Shūdras alone were outside, as the fourth caste. The more you look back into the history of

the past, the more you will see how this comes definitely out. You see how *Varṇa* is really the correct word; how the colour represented in each caste the characteristics of the descent of each caste: the priestly, who were learned, pure Āryans; the fighters, coming from the Āryans and Toltecs; the traders coming from the Āryans and Mongols; the servants coming from the aborigines. This is the historical view, while the other that I was putting is the view based on fundamental facts in nature.

If you will take the trouble to go into that fully, as you may, with the help of the many ethnological treatises and others, that will enable you to judge, you will see that the establishment of these *Varṇas* was a measure of self-preservation, necessary to keep the people of purer blood from such numerous inter-marriages as would have swamped them entirely, and led to their disappearance in those early days; necessary, in order that the Āryan type might persist and dominate; in order that the partial mixture, having occurred, might not be lost, swamped by numbers, but might be preserved with the enormous value that they had gained by bringing over from the past great types all that was necessary for the full development of the Āryan people. Then went out the command that the three castes might not inter-marry outside their own borders, so that the types might be definitely established, and the great Hindū polity built up on that basis of caste, growing out of

hereditary types, out of difference of quality, and partly out of difference of origin. &

But then you must remember that although there was this historical foundation, this necessity for refusing further intermarriages and for laying down strict rules as to the intermarriage of the caste-people among themselves, none the less there were many exceptions. You will find in the *Institutes of Manu*, mixed as they are, you will find there that a Brāhmaṇa, having married a Brāhmaṇa wife, might, under certain conditions, intermarry with the other castes. You will find also that it was possible for people to pass from one caste to another.

When is the thread ceremony, at what age? It is not, like the Christian baptism, performed with a babe. The Christian theory that a baby is taken into the Christian Church is quite rational and intelligible. A Christian parent has a child, and the baby is baptised into Christianity. But you never give the sacred thread to a boy as a baby. You give it to him when he has reached a definite age, varying according to the caste. Why, do you suppose? Surely because of the qualities. If the inborn quality was not there, justifying the birth from a Brāhmaṇa or a Kṣhattriya parent, then that child might not be recognised as belonging to that particular caste. If you doubt it, let me for a moment turn to the authorities which at least every orthodox Hindū must accept—I do not say that the unorthodox need accept.

them. I find it laid down most definitely in the *Mahābhārata* : " Not birth, not Samskāras, not study of the Vedas, not ancestry, are causes of Brāhmaṇa-hood. Conduct alone is verily the cause thereof." Now it is sometimes said that this is based on the idea of reincarnation only, and that conduct in one life would simply bring a man into the appropriate caste in another. That would be a maintainable proposition if that passage stood alone, for I frankly admit that the whole idea of caste, as a religious institution, is based on the great principle of reincarnation ; I have often pointed out that the soul is intended to pass up from caste to caste, learning the lessons of each caste in the lives that are spent therein. But I read with regard to this same question not only the statement that birth and samskāras alone cannot make the Brāhmaṇa, but I read a sarcastic phrase : " As a wooden elephant, as a leathern deer, such is the unlearned Brāhmaṇa ; the three are only names. The Brāhmaṇa who, not having studied the Vedas, labours elsewhere, becomes a Shūdra in that very life, together with his descendants." I have heard some of my Vakil friends say, that they do not know anything about the Vedas ; I have heard them suggest that the doctrines of Hindūism were quite outside their study ; so that I might almost read into this that the Brāhmaṇa Vakil, who, not having studied the Vedas, labours elsewhere in the law-courts, becomes, according to the doctrines of the Hindūs, a Shūdra in this very life ! You know

you cannot apply orthodoxy on one side and not the other. You cannot argue on the documents as far as they help you, and then carefully shut them up the moment they go against you. That is what many of my orthodox friends do. They quote the Shāstras wherever they suit them. We have a proverb in England that "the devil can quote scripture for his own purpose".

A wooden elephant and a leathern deer may be pretty and ornamental, but they are not of much use; and there is a great deal of birth-Brāhmaṇa-hood to-day which, like the wooden elephant and like the leathern deer, is exceedingly ornamental in the matter of privileges, but is not very valuable in the matter of the qualities of the caste. That is the point that you must bear in mind in the changes that are to come.

Then you may read: "The Shūdra becomes a Brāhmaṇa, and the Brāhmaṇa a Shūdra (by conduct). Know this same to apply to him who is born of a Kṣhatṛiya or of a Vaishya. It is conduct that makes them, not birth."

I should venture to submit that a perfect Brāhmaṇa would have both conduct and birth; but so thoroughly was it recognised that conduct was necessary, that that was made sometimes the only test of caste. You remember in the *Chhāndogyaopaniṣad*, when Satya-kāma came for instruction, and he was asked by the Guru whose disciple he wished to be: "To what Gotra

do you belong?"—a quite proper question—Satyākāma did not know. He was desirous of truth, as his name implies; he spoke the truth. He said: "I do not know my Goṭra; I was born when my mother was a maid-servant at an inn. Jābālā was her name." What was the answer of the Guru? He embraced the boy and said: "Because you have spoken the truth, I accept you as a pupil." So he passed into the Brāhmaṇa caste—though apparently an illegitimate lad—because he showed what ought to be the quality of a Brāhmaṇa, that he could not tell a lie, even for his own credit, even to gain his own end. But he does not stand alone. I can give you a dozen names of people who changed their caste in the old days, because they showed the quality of one in which they were not born and desired the name as well as the quality. With all these undoubted facts behind you, can you say that your modern caste system is right as a matter of fact? Never. Birth alone shines out at every point. Sometimes what ought to be the child-soul of a Shūdra is found in the body of a Brāhmaṇa, or the bargaining soul, as it ought to be, of the Vaishya, in the body of a Kṣhatriya. Can you pretend that these are the castes spoken of by Shri Kṛṣṇa as emanating out of Him by qualities and character? The only thing you can do, in such conditions, if you wish to keep the outline of caste, is to change it back to the old flexible form, and say that whatever the qualities are which the man shows out, they mark his

caste. Then it would be reasonable ; then it would answer to the facts of nature ; then it would show caste as part of a natural order, and no one would object to it. But° when you find the whole thing mixed up anyhow, and the qualities of one in the body of another, can you wonder that respect for the men who have the name and not the reality has fallen away ?

Then there is another point on this that I should like to put to you. It is not a question only of the four great castes in modern India ; it is a question of the innumerable sub-castes which break up the whole of Indian society practically into these little watertight compartments. Why, you cannot marry a child outside your own fragment of caste. It is not as though a Brāhmaṇa merely married a Brāhmaṇa ; it is this particular kind of Brāhmaṇa who must marry with their particular kind. There is far more harm in these artificial distinctions of sub-castes, than there is in the four broad divisions of caste. It was because of that, that when writing the textbook for our students of the Central Hindū College, while showing what caste ought to be, the following words were used : " Hindūs are split up into innumerable little bodies, each hedged in by a wall of its own, regarded as all-important. It is difficult, if not impossible, to create a national spirit from such inharmonious materials, and to induce those who are accustomed to such narrow horizons to take a broader view of life. While a man of one of the four castes in the

old days felt himself to be an integral part of the nation, a man of a small sub-caste has no sense of organic life and tends to be a sectarian rather than a patriot." And then we went on to say: "Unless the abuses which are interwoven with it [the caste system] can be eliminated, its doom is certain; but equally certain is it that if the abuses could be destroyed and the system itself maintained, Hinduism would solve some of the social problems which threaten to undermine western civilisation, and would set an example to the world of an ideal social State."

It was because I know the West so well, with all its struggle and its competition, that when I first came here and found this outline of the caste system, I tried to find out whether it was not possible to revive the old system by reviving the dharma, so as to make caste a reality. The first eleven years of my working in India, I worked perpetually at the attempt to revive the idea of dharma, of function, in relation to the four great castes. By 1905 I had come to the conclusion that it was hopeless; that you could not get those who were the highest caste to go back to the old duties, to give up the power, the wealth, that they were accumulating, and the life, the larger life in the world, which had become their natural expression. By that time I saw the task was hopeless, and from that time onwards I have been working, solely to form an opinion in favour of change. Seeing, then, in the words that I

have lately quoted, that the system was dying, I urged that we should try to make the transition as easy as possible; that amid "the crash of falling systems" we should try to carry on the realities while we could not carry on the form; and failing in that 'also from 1905 onwards, I have found myself compelled to go a step further and to say: It is not possible to do anything more than to admit that the form is now but a shell and not a reality, that it answers neither to natural facts nor to social functions, nor to anything of the historical conditions which once in the past made caste valuable, nay, priceless, to India. I regret it, but am bound to say that I do not believe the caste system can continue in India in the changing life of the nation, and with the heavy responsibilities which, more and more, will fall upon her sons. Since the castes will not perform their dharma, since none are willing to take up special work because they have the birthright, I think we must be honest and say that qualities and caste are separate; the Brāhmaṇa does not show the Brāhmaṇa quality, save here and there in his power of self-sacrifice, in which his claim to the ancient Brāhmaṇa spirit shows itself. I have said sometimes that it is among your Vakil population that you find your best, your most self-sacrificing workers, and I love to think that that is because they are mostly Brāhmaṇa, and that they have brought over that splendid quality by tradition from the past.

It seems to me, friends, that the steps that we have to take now are steps which shall abolish the distinctions of caste which no longer represent realities. And there is one idea that I am borrowing from Babu Bepin Chandra Pāl of a most valuable character, which I had worked out to some extent for myself, but which he has put better in a little paper given to me by Mr. N. K. Ramaśwami Aiyar. In a very useful way he has pointed out that Varna never stood alone; it was always Varna-āshrama was emphasised, and he has urged that the discipline of the Āshrama kept the Varna along healthy and real lines. He points out, for instance, that it is only in the second Āshrama, the household life, that caste really comes out in all its divisions. In the Brahmacharya, the first of the Āshramas, all the boys went together to the Guru; they lived alike; they were on an equal footing; they all begged; they all studied; they lighted the Guru's fire; they looked after the Guru's cattle, and all the rest. So there were no caste divisions; all were equal. During this time, they did not go back to the family; they remained with the Guru from the time of the giving of the thread until their education was completed. So that through the whole of the student life caste did not appear. When they came into the Grhasṭha life, the second Āshrama, then the divisions of caste appeared; then they were carrying on the functions of national life, the functions of organic

life, through the castes. When that was over, they passed into the third Āshrama—the Vānaprastha—the forest-dweller. Then again caste disappeared. No longer was any claim made upon others; and in the Samnyāsa, the last Āshrama—what is there? It is the Shūdra caste glorified; the servant, no longer the servant of the individual but the servant of humanity. He owns nothing; he holds nothing; he gives himself to the people; he has become, as it were, a transfigured Shūdra, the lowest become the highest, after the Āshramas had been gone through. What was the result? As Mr. Pāl says, it made caste only in one Āshrama practically, the Gr̥has̥tha. In the first, the Brahmacharya, the third, the Vānaprastha, the fourth, the Samnyāsa, there were no traces left of caste. A most luminous idea, showing how the training of the Āshramas kept the caste in its right place; how a boy, coming out, with nothing of caste-pride in him, to take up the Gr̥has̥tha function in the body politic, would go to the discharge of the duties for which his qualities fitted him. So the Vaishya would be a Vaishya because he had the qualities of a Vaishya, the Kṣhat̥triya a Kṣhat̥triya, the Brāhmaṇa a Brāhmaṇa. Thus in the life of the household, the name would express the function and the character of the man who entered into it. So the Ashrama moulded the Varṇa, and the two together gave you a splendid social order.

We are not likely to get that back. That would be too good to be true. And let us say frankly,

friends, that we have no true caste in India to-day. We only have the name of it. That is why I speak of the 'passing' of it. Nor can you wisely have it restored in the form in which it once existed, even if that were possible. For you have to take up greater responsibilities, the greater responsibilities of Self-Government which I have spoken of, and caste is keeping you out of the conditions of life which are absolutely necessary for the growing of India in the future. If you have to mingle with all around you, men of every caste and men of none; if you have to mingle with the English, as you must do—for remember the colour bar exists on your own side as well as on theirs; if I spoke on Friday of the pride and arrogance of the one, we must not forget that on the other side there was and is as much pride, as in the days when a Brāhmaṇa would wash his hands carefully if he had shaken hands with an Englishman. The bar is not all on one side; I have had a Brāhmaṇa do it with me; I do not mind, naturally, because I thought it foolish and childish. But there is the fact that now you have to mingle side by side. I have pleaded for equality, but equality in society and politics means intermingling with people of all castes, and with the English and with other foreigners as well. You cannot do your duty to Mother India in the future, unless you are willing to meet men of all types on the same level. What about our Musalmān friends? Caste breaks up Indian society far more than

anything else. What may not be accomplished if Hindūism and Islām are left to mingle without any barrier of caste? So far as I know, Islām is the only religion where there is absolutely no caste. I have seen a Musalmān take food out of the same dish with a man who was on the same level as a Pariah; a low-born Musalmān taking food out of the same dish as a Musalmān gentleman. If Musalmāns and Hindūs are to work for the redemption of India side by side, this caste division must go. You cannot refuse to work with them; for if you do, it means working against each other. There will then be no possibility of the greatness for India of which we dream. It is not a division of religion. Your philosophy is the same. If you will only look into it, there is really no difference between the Vedānta of the Hindūs and the great metaphysics of the Middle Age doctors of Islām. I have read both, and I know that of which I speak. I see the bridge between the two religions in that wonderful teaching which comes from both alike. But the caste difficulty is a real one. You cannot sit side by side to take food; you cannot now even eat in opposite rows. In Benares the fathers of the present generation were less rigid. The barrier of caste is now stricter than it was in those days. Some of my friends tell me that when they were little boys they had food in the same room with their Muslim brethren. They ate in the same room, and they

talked over the same food. Again, when you meet Englishmen you must meet them on terms of social equality. You cannot do that, while your caste keeps you separate. You have to choose between isolation and subjection inside your caste, or, on the other hand, perfect political and social equality outside the barriers of caste. Inevitably it is coming, whether you will or not. The Spirit of the Age is greater than any believe who are clinging to old customs from which the life has fled.

But you have a choice between two ways of change. And now I venture to speak to my Brāhmaṇa friends. There are two ways in which privilege disappears: one when the people, who no longer respect the privilege-holders, are angry with these privileges which outrage their sense of justice; and if it goes too far, you get a great uprising like the French Revolution, and the privileged aristocracy perish by violence and are lost in the midst of the nation. Or you may have the wonderful action of the privileged class in Japan, as privileged as any of the Brāhmaṇa caste here, who, called on for their country's sake, stripped off every privilege they held and threw them at the feet of the Motherland, in order that she might become free and great. Their privileges were even greater than the Brāhmaṇa privileges here. They might strike down a man in the street who they thought insulted them, striking him down with the sword which they alone might wear.

None could say them nay, none could arrest or save; and yet that warrior caste, proud with the pride of warriors, flung all aside and stepped down amongst the people, content to justify their warrior spirit in the war against Russia, where those very Japanese who had thrown away their privileges showed their Kṣhatṭriya spirit, lived on the battle-fields in defence of their country.

Which way will you take, you of the great Bṛāhmaṇa caste? Will you wait until the surging wave of prejudice and anger, rising higher, higher, and higher, sweeps you all away against your will? or will you perform that noblest of all acts—sacrifice your privileges for the sake of Freedom, for the sake of the greatness of the Motherland, stretching out your hands to all without exception, and calling on all to share with you in the redemption of the land?

Oh! I have had a vision, which I hope is not only a dream, of this mighty caste, which in the past has given to India all that she has of greatest in her literature, in her arts; of you, the natural leaders of the people by your high education, by your brilliant intelligence, by your power of speech—I have had a vision of your mighty caste going forward to the feet of India, the Mother, taking off the coronet of privilege from your own heads and laying it down in sacrifice at her feet. I have dreamt that that great act of national sacrifice, once accomplished, splendidly

performed, India the Mother would stretch out her hand in blessing, and would say to her children who had made the sacrifice : " Go back to your people, and take your rightful place again as leaders still in India. Give to them your splendid intellect, give to them your wonderful eloquence, give to them the power of your past and the influence of your names, crowned no longer with the crown of privilege but with the deathless crown of self-sacrifice."

That is the vision which I have seen, that the dream which I hope will prove true. ' Then the Brāhmaṇas, having stepped down, will be raised up by the love of a grateful people, who will follow leaders who are leaders by quality, and not merely by the accident of birth.